



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Aviation
Administration**

Office of the Administrator

800 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20591

November 1, 2012

The Honorable Howard P. McKeon
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman McKeon:

Thank you for your August 1 letter, cosigned by your congressional colleagues, about the establishment of the six Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) test sites as required by the FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012, as well as the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) coordination with other agencies as we work towards integrating UAS into the National Airspace System (NAS).

As you know, the FAA's primary mission is, and will continue to be, safety. This responsibility encompasses managing our current activities to keep the people, aircraft, and property in the world's most complex airspace system safe while ensuring that the introduction of UAS into this airspace system is thoughtfully planned and carefully managed.

The FAA is making progress in a number of areas related to UAS. For example, the Agency has streamlined the process for public agencies to safely fly UAS in the Nation's airspace, as required under the FAA Reauthorization. In addition, in March 2012, the Agency created a new UAS integration office, headed by a single executive that brings together specialists from the aviation safety and air traffic organizations. The office serves as the FAA's one-stop portal for all matters related to civil and public use of UAS in U.S. airspace.

The six UAS test sites are an important component of our research and development efforts. As such, we must ensure we understand the many operational challenges we may encounter before requesting proposals. Examples of such considerations include: training requirements, operational specifications, and technology concerns. These areas of research will support developing our regulatory approach for the integration of UAS operations into the NAS.

Once the FAA Reauthorization was enacted, we moved swiftly to establish the UAS Test Site Program. The program was established on March 9, well in advance of the August 12 deadline, when we published a Request for Comments (RFC) about the test sites. Since publishing the RFC, the FAA's UAS Integration Office has been working diligently to establish the framework for test site selection, including the development of the Screening Information Request (SIR).

The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) has assisted the FAA in developing the SIR and will provide subject matter experts to assist throughout the process.

Our target was to have the six test sites named by the end of 2012. However, increasing the use of UAS in our airspace also raises privacy issues, and these issues will need to be addressed as unmanned aircraft are safely integrated. We are working to move forward with the proposals for the six test sites as we evaluate options with our interagency partners to appropriately address privacy concerns regarding the expanded use of UAS.

A key element of our integration efforts is working closely with DoD and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) through the Joint Planning and Development Office (JPDO). One of the major activities in this area is development of the UAS Comprehensive Plan. This plan will integrate four key cross-agency components: the JPDO UAS National Goals, the FAA UAS Concept of Operations, the FAA UAS Integration Roadmap, and the JPDO UAS Research and Development Prioritization.

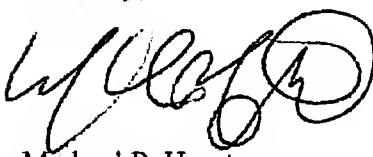
In addition to JPDO activities, we are also working with Agency partners through the UAS Executive Committee (ExCom). The mission of the multi-agency UAS ExCom is to enable increased and ultimately routine access of Federal UAS engaged in public aircraft operations in the NAS to support operational, training, developmental, and research requirements of the FAA, DoD, NASA, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

The FAA will complete its statutory obligations to integrate UAS into the NAS as quickly and efficiently as possible. However, we must fulfill those obligations in a thoughtful, prudent manner that ensures safety, addresses privacy issues, and promotes economic growth.

We have sent an identical letter to each of the cosigners of your letter.

If I can be of further assistance, please contact me or Roderick D. Hall, Assistant Administrator for Government and Industry Affairs, at (202) 267-3277.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael P. Huerta', with a large, stylized circular flourish at the end.

Michael P. Huerta
Acting Administrator